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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2450
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1384
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SUBJECT: ARAB LEAGUE BOYCOTT MEETING - READOUT

Classified By: CDA Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

Ref: Damascus 2341

¶1. (U) Summary. The semi-annual meeting of the Arab League Boycott Office (ALBO) was held November 6-9 in Damascus, with representation from the same 14 countries that attended the last meeting in May 2006 (ref A). Some participants feel the semi-annual conference has outlived its usefulness and will fade away if progress is made on the peace process. A minority view continues to insist the meeting is necessary if only for the political statement it makes. Reports after the fact showed it to be lackluster and nothing new came out of it. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Information from contacts confirms that the following countries were represented at the semi-annual three day meeting of the Arab League Boycott committee: Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Palestine Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen. Information from contacts confirms these attendees. Most states were represented at the working level by their local embassies; our contact at the Kuwait embassy, however, confirmed that his government sent two working-level Customs officials, and went on to report that UAE sent a working-level delegation from Abu Dhabi, which conflicted with the information we were getting from the UAE embassy prior to the meeting.

¶3. (C) EconOff met with local representatives of several Arab League member countries before and after the ALBO meetings. Contacts said before the meeting that they expected turnout to be moderate and actual implementation of any decisions to be low. Based on readouts, the conference was as lackluster as anticipated. Discussions ran along the usual lines, with the loudest calls to action from Syria, the Palestinian Authority and Libya; the loudest objections from Saudi Arabia; and the loudest silence from North Africa.

¶4. (C) The camp of participants who feel that the ALBO has outlived its usefulness includes Tunisia, whose resident econoff commented to us on the eve of the conference that the Arab boycott is especially irrelevant in the modern global economy. He offered the example of Nestle, which does business with Israel but also has a plant in Syria; boycotting Nestle would therefore cost Syrian jobs, and how does that help? The ALBO is a waste of my time and (I wrote this to Tunis, he said. Nasser al Qahtani of the Kuwait Embassy noted that attendance at ALBO meetings historically can be strongly influenced by political events; if the Israeli-Hizbollah conflict were more recent, he said, attendance would be higher and more vocal. Concerns about

future attendance reportedly prompted the local ALBO chief to tell this year's participants that he views Djibouti and Somalia's future involvement to be important to the meeting's continued viability.

15. (C) Comment. Contacts at Arab embassies felt the ALBO was an organization in the sunset of its life, especially given the global nature of business today. Uniformly, their countries attend the meetings but do not implement the secondary and tertiary elements of the boycott. In the end, the ALBO remains relegated to being a forum that allows a few die-hard countries to let off steam, yet permitting some Arab confreres to maintain business ties with Israel without losing face.
CORBIN